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## ABSTRACT

Removal from the schools of educational material objectionable to American Indians is a matter of concern to teachers, parents, Indian communities and organizations, and educational decision makers. To appeal to a wider market, publishers often produce materials favoring the interests of the predominant society. Thus, textbooks and other curricular materials too often portray Indian people and institutions in an inaccurate, limited, and unfair manner, thus perpetuating a distorted historical view. Indian youth and adults must attempt to eradicate such historical and cultural misinformation and bias in instructional materials. One way in which unsatisfactory instructional materials can be identified is through the use of the Project MEDIA evaluation catalog developed by the National Indian Education Association. Community members can also identify and evaluate materials by asking specific questions such as "Does the material generate a pride of heritage in Indian students?", and by obtaining Indian students' reactions to the materials. Comprehensive and well-organized requests for curriculum material removal should be presented to appropriate school decision makers and authorities, which differ with the type of school involved. The many Indian and non-Indian organizations involved in efforts to improve the education of Indian children can assist in such efforts. An alphabetical list of such organizations is included. (SB)

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HOW COMMUNITIES AND AMERICAN INDIAN PARENTS  
CAN IDENTIFY AND REMOVE  
CULTURALLY BIASED BOOKS FROM SCHOOLS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
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BY

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## FOREWARD

Within the past few decades, American Indians and persons of "minority" status in the Anglo society have protested against the racial, ethnic, and sexual biases found in curricular materials in the nation's schools. Textbooks have not been the only medium to which concerned parents, teachers, and students have objected, however. This protest has been widened to include all mass media and other forms of non-print educational media and curriculum. Although errors of commission and omission are legion in the representation of Afro-Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, women and other ethnic groups in the educational materials in United States' schools, none is more vicious, incorrect, culturally insensitive, and patronizing as that accorded the American Indian.

This guide focuses on the problem of biased curricular materials which deal with the American Indian and is also designed to assist Indians in developing strategies for identifying, evaluating, and remedying problems of biased and inaccurate materials in the curriculum of the schools which presume to educate Indian children and youth.

### The Nature of Textbooks and Other Material

Schools in any society perform numerous functions. Among the most important of these is the political socialization of a nation's youth. Much of the curriculum and instructional materials such as textbooks, films, and tapes consciously or unconsciously attempt to inculcate youth with a common sense of history and destiny in order to have them embrace the same social and moral values as those who structure and govern society and its institutions. Curriculum and school materials must then receive at least the tacit endorsement of the individual and corporate elite.

However, neither the American nation nor, for that matter, any other large nation states are monocultural entities. Thus, the attempt to transmit a single view of institutional processes can only result in the denial of the heritage, values and views of culturally diverse groups in a heterogeneous society. Despite this, school curriculum ideology and materials in the United States, as elsewhere, are dominated by certain notions of wisdom, truth, and values which are constructed by the corporate elite and supported by them.

Textbook publishers and producers of non-print media, who are often a segment of the power elite, generally serve these ends and attempt to maximize profits. In order to achieve the latter, instructional materials must be designed to appeal to the widest

possible market. Three groups have either sole or shared responsibility for selection of curricular materials: school boards at the state and local levels, school administrators, and school teachers themselves. Since all of these are dominated by Anglos, publishers tend to produce materials that appeal to the interests of these representatives and employees of the predominant society.

### A Cause for Concern

Throughout the history of the United States' colonial relations with Indian nations, the United States' educational policy for Indian children and youth has been a major source of contention. The efforts of the American government, working through the American schools, to de-Indianize the rising Indian generations has long been recognized as a thinly disguised policy of genocide, acculturation, and the theft of natural and human resources. To many Indians, this assessment is as valid today as it was fifty, a hundred, or more years ago. However, as citizens of captive nations, Indians have had to accept, for themselves and their children, the schools and other governmental institutions of the settler government.

Texts and other curricular materials too often portray Indian people, institutions, and nations in unfair, inaccurate, and limited ways. Stated differently, it can be said that much of what is written about American Indians is pejorative, in

addition, most of what is important about Indian history and culture is not told.

For example, during the 1960's, textbook references to American Indians were not so blatantly errors of commission--but errors of omission. American Indians were portrayed in a historical sense rather than in a contemporary sense:

"The 'wild and woolly' West became a world-renowned section of the United States, symbolizing the centuries-long struggle of Americans against raw nature. The memory of the plains Indian and his buffalo, destroyed so ruthlessly and so abruptly, is a rebuke to Americans even today who delight in their country's resplendent heritage."<sup>1</sup>

In the textbook, Trailblazers of American History, (Locke: 1961) the overall objective of the history series is stated as follows:

"...This series is designed primarily to familiarize young people with their historical heritage, and lead them to a better understanding of how their nation has developed into a great leader in the world family of nations. A related major objective of the series is to make the learner more cognizant of his responsibility as a United States citizen in protecting his historical heritage."<sup>2</sup>

In this same textbook however, references to bloodthirsty and lusty savages are abundant:

"No one in Boonesborough heard the girls screams...On through the woods went the Indians with their captives. Following their trail came Daniel Boone and his rescue party...At last at noon on the second day the rescue party could see the Indians and the girls. They had stopped to eat and were grouped around a campfire. But the rescue was still a great problem. If the Indians saw the pioneers coming, they would kill the girls..."<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis found in the teacher's edition for purposes of class discussion.)



### A Definition of the Problem

Indian youth, at least for a time, attend schools in which they are exposed constantly to the Anglo world view of history, government, language, literature, art, music, and science. This world view places little value on American Indian life and culture. The evolution of America, as it is delineated in school textbooks and other instructional materials, is that this hemisphere in the fifteenth century was barbarous, chaotic, and disorganized. These same aborigines and their institutions retreated and collapsed upon cultural contact with the superior European cultures. This interpretation then shows the Native American futilely seeking to impede the progressive development of the hemisphere while resisting the White Settlers' religious, legal, and social institutions and their attempt to claim Indian land. Rarely are nations identified in these historical accounts except for those that figure in military history. Subduing and eliminating the Indians, thus, became the only progressive and Christian choices.

Once this had been accomplished, the vanquished people had to be controlled, taught the ways of the modern worlds and assimilated, if capable of it, into the dominant society. The difficulty in all this has been that the Indian peoples generally did not appreciate nor understand the advantages of the dominant society.

It is believed that once the Indians recognized that their destiny lay in the full acceptance of the "American Dream," all Indian

problems would automatically disappear. It was considered essential by the dominant society that all children, both non-Indian and Indian, learn these "truths" which formed the gospel of American's corporate elite.

The above version of the colonization of America presents a distorted view of its history. It excludes the richness and variety of Indian life in this hemisphere prior to Europeanization. It fails to note the European diseases rather than military superiority caused the eventual surrender of territory.<sup>4</sup> It does not show the inhumanity, treachery, and avarice of the settlers, civic and religious leaders which could not lead to the acceptance of the invader's values and their God.<sup>5</sup> It omits telling of the 'Anglos' efforts of genocide and cultural annihilation or the numerous treaty violations for the purpose of stripping the Indian people of their lives and their lands. It does not relate the effects of racism, enforced poverty, or the uneasy truces by which the Indian peoples were forced to accept United States' citizenship and federal regulation of the conduct of their personal and national lives.<sup>6</sup> It ignores the brutal fact the American Indians are still required to fight to retain what little land and water are left. This historical view with all its distortions and omissions constitutes the problem of schooling in America for American Indians.

## Strategies

### Strategies for Combating Racism in Instructional Materials at Large

Indian adults and youth must seek to guarantee, to the fullest extent possible, that schools accurately depict historical and cultural aspects of Indian societies, institutions, and values from the time of their contact with the settler society to the present. Further, the awareness that schools significantly affect the social beliefs, the value processes, the formulation of self concept, and the sense of historicity demonstrates that Indian people must make every effort possible to eliminate the cultural bias, misinformation, and stereotypes found in the curricular materials. In those cases of exclusion from educational materials, Indians must demand that the curriculum be supplemented. In addition, those aspects of Indian culture considered appropriate for transmission through the schools should be identified and included.

Several efforts to document the malicious portrayal of Indians in American school materials have been made. These include but are not limited to, such studies as Textbooks and the American Indian (1970) done by the American Indian Historical Society, and Stereotypes, Distortions, and Omissions in U.S. History Textbooks (1977) published by the Council for Interracial Books for Children. Several state departments of education (e.g. Pennsylvania, California, Minnesota) have also produced guidelines for determining

positive treatment of culturally different peoples in the United States and for evaluating the social content of instructional material. Another organization attempting to rectify the situation has been the National Indian Education Association's Project MEDIA

(Media Evaluation and Dissemination by Indian Americans). Project MEDIA has used the expertise of Indian people in evaluating various media and curricular materials and compiled an annotated and partially evaluated listing of several thousand textbooks, literary works, films and other instructional media. The second edition of the listings contain only those materials evaluated from the Indian perspective. Both positive and negative evaluations are presented.

One instance of parental involvement in media selection utilizing Project MEDIA guidelines occurred through the use of a Title IV Parent Committee in a northern Minneapolis suburb. Indian parents had requested that they be involved or consulted in the school's selection of media materials by, about, or for American Indians. School personnel, however, wanted to know what criteria the Indian parents would employ in determining positive from negative media. The parent committee contacted Project MEDIA for guidelines to be used in the media selection process. The parent committee members now have an active voice in the identification and acquisition of Indian media materials for use within the school.

### Strategies for Identifying, Evaluating, and Remedying Problems of Unsatisfactory Instructional Materials.

In order to remove textbooks from use in the classroom, the problem of biased material must first be identified. Evaluation catalogues, such as the National Indian Education Association's Project MEDIA, are available. However, sometimes the cost for such resource materials are too high and the identification of biased materials must be left to the local community. When this is the case, the following questions may be asked to determine whether American Indians are accurately depicted:

1. Does the material generate a pride of heritage in Indian students?
2. Does the material refer accurately and specifically to individual tribes/nations, or does it simply use the general term "Indian?"
3. Is the diversity in tribal history, heritage, and/or customs conveyed to the reader?
4. Is there evident dominance of one culture over another?
5. Does the material use derogatory words, phrases, and images to depict Indian people?
6. Are American Indian contributions to world culture described both historically and contemporarily?
7. Does the material provide comprehensive treatment of American Indian societies of today?

8. Does the material create a positive or a negative image of Indian peoples for the non-Indian reader?

The above list of evaluative criteria is not inclusive of all the types of questions and considerations which should be considered when evaluating biased and stereotyped textbooks. However, if they are utilized it will assist the process of critical analysis and judgment.

There are additional means by which biased material may be identified. The Indian child is one of the best sources for pinpointing negative textbooks. It often is easy to determine objectionable material by listening to what the child says about what he or she is reading, hearing, and seeing in the schools. Parents and other members of the community may also be consulted for their reactions and assistance in discovering problems concerning treatment of Indian peoples and cultures in the school books. When stereotyping and bias are identified, Indian parents must organize themselves, community leaders, and pupils to present their grievances to the school board.

Administrators and school board authorities must be presented with a comprehensive and well organized request for textbook removal. Specific page numbers and illustrations, which reflect particular biases, stereotypes or derogatory terminology, should be identified beforehand and be well organized for presentation when approaching the school authorities.

There are a number of Indian organizations which are concerned and involved in efforts to improve the education of Indian children and youth. Support for the removal of objectionable textbook materials may be acquired through contacting:

1. Local American Indian Centers or community centers.
2. State Indian Education Associations--among the Associations identified are:

Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. (AFN)  
550 West 8th Street  
Anchorage, Alaska

Alaska Native Education Association  
P.O. Box 68  
Barrow, Alaska 99723

Alaska Native Foundation  
411 W. 4th  
Anchorage, Alaska

Arizona Native American Education Association  
302 Farmer Building  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona 85251

California Indian Education Association  
7447 Orien Avenue  
La Mesa, California 92041

Oklahoma Indian Education Association  
222 W. Lindsay  
Suite 206  
Norman, Oklahoma

New York State Indian Education Coalition  
Native American Education Program  
Lawrence Road East  
North Syracuse Central S.D.  
North Syracuse, NY 13212

South Dakota Indian Education Association  
PO Box 1054  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

3. Advocates for Indian Education  
E. 905 Third Avenue  
Spokane, Washington 99202
4. All Indian Pueblo Council (AIPC)  
P.O. Box 6507 Station B  
1015 Indian School Road N.W.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107
5. American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)  
1626 High Street  
Denver, Colorado 80218
6. American Indian Historical Society  
1451 Masonic Avenue  
San Francisco, California 94117
7. American Indian Law Program  
University of New Mexico  
1117 Stanford Drive, NE  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
8. Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO)  
600 Second N.W.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico
9. Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Indian Education Resource Center  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103
10. Coalition of Eastern Native Americans  
Star Route B Box 604  
Atmore, Alabama 36502
11. Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards, Inc. (CICSB)  
511 16th Street  
Denver, Colorado 80202
12. Great Lakes Intertribal Council (GLITC)  
P.O. Box 636  
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806



13. Indian Education Training, Inc.  
1110 Pennsylvania N.E., Suite C  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110
14. Institute for the Development of Indian Law  
927 15th Street N.W.  
Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20005
15. Indian Organization Development Inc.  
P.O. Box 7135 University Station  
Provo, Utah 84602
16. National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE)  
425 13th Street N.W.  
Pennsylvania Building, Suite 326  
Washington, D.C. 20004
17. National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)  
1430 K Street N.W. #700  
Washington D.C. 20005
18. National Indian Adult Education Association (UIATF/ABE)  
3604 West Government Way Extension  
Seattle, Washington 98199
19. National Indian Education Association (NIEA)  
1115 Second Avenue South  
Ivy Tower Building  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403
20. National Indian Management Service of America Inc.  
Post Office Box 605  
Philadelphia, Mississippi 39350
21. National Tribal Chairmen Association (NTCA)  
1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 207  
Washington, D.C. 20006
22. Native American Materials Development Center  
407 Rio Grande Blvd., N.W.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103
23. Native American Rights Fund  
1506 Broadway  
Boulder, Colorado 80302

24. Navajo Division of Education  
The Navajo Tribe  
Window Rock, Arizona 87112
25. North American Indian Women's Association (NAIWA)  
P.O. Box 314  
Isleta, New Mexico 87022
26. Small Tribes of Western Washington (STOWW)  
520 Pacific Avenue  
Sumner, Washington 98390
27. United Indians of All Tribes Foundation (UIATF)  
Day Break Star Indian Cultural-Educational Center  
Discovery Park  
Seattle, Washington 98119
28. United States Office of Indian Education (OIE)  
Federal Office Building 6  
400 Maryland Avenue S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202
29. United South Eastern Tribes Inc. (USET)  
1101 Kermit Drive  
Nashville, Tennessee 37217

The above organizations may also be of assistance in the areas of education, law, community action or other related fields involved with the improvement and achievement of maximum opportunities for American Indians.

Additionally, the Native American Graduate Program of the Educational Policy Studies Department at the Pennsylvania State University is in the process of developing an American Indian Educational Policy Center. One component will be designed to utilize tribal leaders, Indian scholars, and graduate students in the analysis of instructional materials. The Center will be prepared further to identify,

on a state by state basis, contact persons within a particular state for assistance in determining the appropriate action to take concerning objectionable instructional materials for Indian children and youth. This organization may be contacted through the following program:

Native American Graduate Program  
319 Rackley Building  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, Pennsylvania 16802

There are a number of non-Indian organizations whose assistance may also be sought. Among them are the following:

1. Teacher organizations - Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers and their individual state affiliates are pledged to the removal of racism from American schools. If teachers within a local community who are members of one of these organizations utilize their power to bring the issue of American Indian textbook representation to the attention of their state and national organization, action may be immediate.
2. State Boards of Education - In many states, the State Board of Education has an Equal Education Opportunity Office or an Inter-group Relations Office, as well as an Indian Education Division. Often these offices have published guidelines for culturally-fair curriculum materials. Protests lodged with the Board and an insistence that it take an

active role in eliminating objectionable materials in the local schools will help to increase the pressure on local school officials.

3. State Human Relations Commissions - This state agency is charged with the protection of individual rights and with the elimination of discrimination and bias. Although the Commission's primary focus is not in the educational field, support and possibly investigation into a particular problem may be obtained from this agency.

Other non-Indian organizations which could lend assistance or support include:

1. American Association of School Administrators  
1801 North Moore Street  
Arlington, Virginia 22209
2. American Civil Liberties Union  
1345 E. Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.
3. Education Commission of the States  
1860 Lincoln Street  
Suite 300  
Denver, Colorado 80295
4. ERIC/CRESS  
Box 3AP  
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003
5. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
1121 Vermont Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C.
6. Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development  
1701 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

An additional avenue which lies open for improving the image of the American Indian in textbooks is to approach publishers. Letters from individuals, parent or community committees, tribal organizations, and Indian and non-Indian agencies which explain and support textbook grievances may do much to exert pressure upon publishers to remove offending materials. Some publishers claim they are sensitive to problems of racism and sexism. For example, in 1975, Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc. issued guidelines that suggest an awareness of the problem of textbook bias. If a problem is identified, the publisher should be notified at once and relief demanded to solve the problem.

American Indian children and youth are in attendance in a variety of school settings: Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, Tribal Contract schools, Alternative Indian Schools, public schools, public schools with Title IV (Indian Education Act, 1972) programs, and private and parochial schools. As stated previously, many of the schools' instructional materials treat American Indian peoples and cultures in unsatisfactory and/or demeaning ways. Whether the rationale for utilizing such materials with Indian children and youths is based on ignorance, racism, or the presumed lack of available culturally relevant and accurate textbooks is immaterial. The issue cannot be ignored.

Through individual, community, and tribal protest to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and its different area

offices, pressure can be brought to bear upon the Bureau schools.

Support from state and national Indian organizations, as well as support from certain non-Indian organizations, may also be sought.

The problem of objectionable textbook or other curricular materials in the context of Alternative School situations should not be present. Teaching and administrative personnel in these schools could serve as support groups and possibly provide technical assistance in the evaluation of existing curricula.

Public schools can be pressured by Indian community people and organizations, by state and national Indian groups, by state agencies of education and human relations, by state and national teacher organizations, and by academic organizations.

Public schools with Title IV programs can best be challenged through the parent committees provided for by the law funding such programs and by all of the agencies listed under public schools shown above.

Private and parochial schools, especially those dependent upon tuition charges, are vulnerable to economic pressure and to appeals to their boards of directors, to state and national religious sponsoring agencies, and to pressure from Indian and non-Indian educational organizations.

Finally, non-Indian teachers and decision makers who are assigned to schools attended by Indian students should be required to have

an additional baseline of Indian culture and heritage. This educational service can be provided by the American Indian Studies Programs located in many universities to prospective teachers and decision makers before they actually assume their duties. In the absence of such a program, the school could provide the necessary background through instructional kits provided by American Indian Studies Programs. It is essential that teachers as well as parents, Indian communities, decision makers, and concerned organizations be involved with the removal of educational materials objectionable to Indians.

In summary, much has to be done in the way of erasing the negative, biased stereotyped, and inaccurate instructional materials existing in the nation's schools today. Of even greater importance is the concern for future textbook publication. Only by exercising constitutional, political, and social rights can American Indian parents, students, and teachers achieve maximum quality educational opportunities for American Indian youth.

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6. "Longest Walk Manifesto," Congressional Record, July 1978.



### VITA

Rebecca Robbins (Standing Rock Sioux) was the past director of Project MEDIA, a division of the National Indian Education Association. Ms. Robbins has conducted approximately 50 workshops nationwide in the area of American Indian media evaluation for teachers, administrators, parents, students and librarians who are involved in the education of American Indian children and youth. She has served on the Executive Planning Committee for the Minnesota Women's Meeting (1977), participated in the Minority Women in Educational Research Conference (1977) and was selected for an internship at the U.S. Office of Education/Office of Indian Education (1978).

Currently, Ms. Robbins is an advanced graduate student in the Native American Graduate Program at The Pennsylvania State University and is pursuing a doctoral degree in American Indian Education Policy, the first degree of its kind. She was a past participant in the Library training Program for American Indians at the Arizona State University where she acquired a B.A. in Education.

Ms. Robbins holds membership in professional organizations including the National Indian Education Association, American Educational Research Association, Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development and the North American Indian Women's Association.